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Mobilian Jargon

Mobilian Jargon (also **Mobilian trade language**, **Mobilian Trade Jargon**, **Chickasaw–Choctaw trade language**, **Yamá**) was a pidgin used as a lingua franca among Native American groups living along the Gulf of Mexico around the time of European settlement of the region. It was the main language among Indian tribes in this area, mainly Louisiana. There is evidence indicating its existence as early as the late 17th to early 18th century. The Indian groups that are said to have used it were the Alabama, Apalachee, Biloxi, Chacato, Pakana, Pascagoula, Taensa, Tunica, Caddo, Chickasaw, Houma, Choctaw, Chitimacha, Natchez, and Ofo. The name is thought to refer to the Mobile Indians of the central Gulf Coast, but did not originate from this group; Mobilian Jargon is linguistically and grammatically different from the language traditionally spoken by the Mobile Indians.

Mobilian Jargon facilitated trade between tribes speaking different languages and European settlers. There is continuing debate as to when Mobilian Jargon first began to be spoken. Some scholars, such as James Crawford, have argued that Mobilian Jargon has its origins in the linguistically diverse environment following the establishment of the French colony of Louisiana. Others, however, suggest that the already linguistically diverse environment of the lower Mississippi basin drove the need for a common method of communication prior to regular contact with Europeans.

Mobilian	
Yamá	
Native to	United States
Region	Gulf coast and Mississippi Valley
Extinct	active through 1950s to early 18th century
Language family	Muskogean-based pidgin
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	`mod`
Linguist List	`mod` (http://multit ree.org/codes/mod)
Glottolog	`mobi1236` (http://g lottolog.org/resou rce/languoid/id/mo bi1236)[1]

The Native Americans of the Gulf coast and Mississippi valley have always spoken multiple languages, mainly the languages of the other tribes that inhabited the same area. The Mobilians, like these neighboring tribes, were also multi-lingual. By the early 19th century, Mobilian Jargon evolved from functioning solely as a contact language between people into a means of personal identification. With an increasing presence of outsiders in the Indian Gulf coast community, Mobilian Jargon served as a way of knowing who was truly a native of the area, and allowed Mobilians to be socially isolated from non-Indian population expansion from the north.[2]

Contents

Distribution

Mobilian was used from the <u>Florida</u> northwest coast and area of the current <u>Alabama</u>-<u>Georgia</u> border westward as far as eastern <u>Texas</u> and in the north from the lower <u>Mississippi Valley</u> (currently south and central <u>Illinois</u>) to the southern <u>Mississippi River Delta</u> region in the south. It is known to have been used by the Alabama, Apalachee, Biloxi, Chacato, Pakana, Pascagoula, Taensa, Tunica, Caddo, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Chitimacha, Natchez, and Ofo. Although, there is some evidence that Mobilian Jargon was used about 500 miles upstream the Missouri River near the Oyo or Osage Indians during the late 18th century. Some scholars also have reason to believe that the language was used or somehow came in contact with groups using the Algonquian languages of the Northeast to Midwest, with which Mobilian Jargon shares a number of words, such as papo(s) or papoš, meaning 'baby, child', which undeniably resembles the Narragansett word with the same meaning, pápūs. It is unknown how the crossover between the languages occurred; some possibilities include direct contact with Algonquian-speaking peoples in Virginia and North Carolina, or perhaps contact with French explorers using the Algonquian language at the time. Other Europeans also learned the language, but not in a way where they understood the cultural aspects of it; just enough for them to be able to trade with the Indians.

Origins

The accepted view of the origin is that it developed from contact with the French in the 18th century. But there is obscurity in that. It seems that there was a pre-European origin that is supported through its well-established use in diverse indigenous contexts, geographic overlapping with that of Southeastern Indian groups formerly associated in multilingual paramount chiefdoms of the pre-Columbian Mississippian Complex, and its indigenous grammar. Mobilian Jargon has a recorded history of at least 250 years where the first reliable evidence dated 1700. For two centuries it was socially accepted to use as a lingua franca with the outsiders they interacted with, such as traders and settlers. It is presumed that fur traders spread the language to Choctaw and Chickasaw provinces. Though Indians spoke in Mobilian Jargon to outsiders, the outsiders did not have a full understanding of how special the nature and functions of Mobilian Jargon was. Because of this, the Indians created a cultural barrier, preserving their cultural integrity and privacy from non-Indian groups. The pervasiveness of Mobilian Jargon, as a result, created its longtime survival.

Mobilian Jargon is a pidginized or "corrupted"/"complex" form of <u>Choctaw</u> and <u>Chickasaw</u> (both Western <u>Muskogean</u>) that also contains elements of Eastern Muskogean languages such as <u>Alabama</u> and <u>Koasati</u>, colonial languages including <u>Spanish</u>, <u>French</u>, and <u>English</u>, and perhaps <u>Algonquian</u> and/or other languages. <u>Pamela Munro</u> has argued that Choctaw is the major contributing language (not both Choctaw and Chickasaw) although this has been challenged by Emanuel Drechsel. He has concluded that the presence of certain Algonquian words in Mobilian Jargon are the result of direct contact between the Mobilians of the Mississippi valley and <u>Algonquins</u> moving southward. For the most part, these "loanwords" differ by only one or two letters.[3]

Grammar

In its syntax, Mobilian Jargon was fundamentally Muskogean and compared to other southeastern Indian tribes it showed a reduced morphology. Its lexicon shares major similarities to other Muskogean languages, in particular to Chickasaw and to Alabama. Though it evolved from more complex and polysynthetic Native American languages, Mobilian Jargon has a simpler structure where verbs are not required to have subject or object affixes and the subject-object-verb ordering in the sentence is variable. It also requires a separate word after the verb to indicate tense, whereas Muskogean languages use a suffix. It has a simplified syllable and sound structure and a simplified grammar as compared to Choctaw, its primary parent language. Mobilian Jargon was at one point a Muskogean- based pidgin. It was linguistically reduced from analytical

grammar. Mobilian Jargon related to Muskogean proper linguistics and historical facts. Mobilians used a lot of Western Muskogean in their spoken language. Compare the personal pronouns among Muskogean languages:

English	Mobilian	Alabama	Choctaw	Chickasaw
I	inu	ino	ano	ano, ino
You	išnu	isno	čišno	išno
We	pošnu	posno	pišno	pošno

[4]

Revitalization

The extinct language has not made its way into the present day as a functional language. Europeans did not feel much of a need to document the language. There is documentary evidence in numerous historical records such as journals, diaries, reports and scholarly treatments. What Europeans did decide to document though was very little and safe to assume that they did not have a full understanding of Mobilian Jargon. Europeans believed that Mobilian Jargon was the "mother" language of all other Indian languages, due to their lack of observation that Mobilian Jargon was actually a hybrid of the Choctaw and Chickasaw tribe's language. Since it was mainly used as a spoken trade language, its use as a language became unnecessary; the language was lost and eventually became extinct. Though Mobilian was first written about in the 1700s and was spoken until the 1950s, in the 1980s elders in the region of Louisiana could still recall a few select words and phrases.[5] In 2012, the Mezcal Jazz Unit of Montpellier, France, collaborated by Internet with Grayhawk Perkins, a historian of the Muskogean nation, to make a recording titled *Thirteen Moons* which features "the soulful chants of ancient folk tales and more modern stories told in Mobilian."[6]

Notes

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3. Drechsel, Emanuel (1985). "Algonquian Loanwords in Mobilian Jargon". *International Journal of American Linguistics*. **51** (4): 393–396. doi:10.1086/465906 (https://doi.org/10.1086%2F465 906).
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6. "French, New Orleans musicians revive colonial language" (http://www.france24.com/en/20120 627-french-new-orleans-musicians-revive-colonial-language). *FRANCE 24*. June 2012. Retrieved 2012-08-05.

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- Mobilian Jargon in Historiography: An Exercise in the Ethnohistory of Speaking (n.d.): n. pag.

External links

- "Native American Audio Collections: Mobilian (archived version from archive.org)" (https://web.archive.org/web/20170214032239/https://www.amphilsoc.org/exhibit/natamaudio/mobilian). *American Philosophical Society*. Archived from the original (https://www.amphilsoc.org/exhibit/natamaudio/mobilian) on 2017-02-14.

1. Drechsel, Emanuel (2008). "Mobilian Jargon in Historiography: An Exercise in the Ethnohistory of Speaking". *Southern Anthropologist*. **33**: 24.
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